

MAGAZINES AS ENGLISH TEXTS IN HIGH SCHOOL

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## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

### I. Magazines:

- 1-----The Outlook
- 2-----The Literary Digest
- 3-----Independent
- 4-----Education

### II. Pamphlets:

- 1-----"Digest Day".
- 2-----Others issued by the  
Independent and Outlook.

### III. Letters from Teachers and Professors.

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MAGAZINES AS ENGLISH TEXTS IN HIGH SCHOOL

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Of all the studies taught in secondary schools, English is, in all probability, the most important. English is the basis for all other studies. Its practical value in oral and written expression are at once apparent; It is the one study which gathers up all the expressions of various authors and then turns them into the current of present day life. And yet it often fails because a definite point of contact with life has not been established; and it is important to establish relationship during school days with the life going on in the great world.

This cannot be accomplished by the usual method of teaching the classics. The highest purpose of the teaching of English is to give the best adaptation to the environment, and the pupil will not find this in the old stilted phraseology of yester-year. He demands something modern and up-to-date. He is not satisfied with what he gets in school and, in spite of oft repeated warnings, gets hold of trashy reading matter.

Frederick Hawk Law of the Stuyvesant High School New York City, says in this connection:

"A few years ago it was not at all the custom to introduce into the schoolroom any periodical whatever. In fact, little was said concerning such publications. The student saw spread before him, outside the classroom door, the whole list of



publications, good and bad, and----following his adolescent ideals as instinctively as a baby reaches for a red toy in preference to one of a more sombre color----he naturally chose periodicals that made most appeal to emotion, that stimulated the imagination by means of various devices, and that made the most pronounced statements of altruism. He by no means chose periodicals because of bad qualities that older people saw in them; he chose them because of apparent good qualities that his inexperience with life prevented him from interpreting as hypocritical or fallacious in theory. "

A high school pupil makes no very extended search for reading material. He accepts what comes first to hand; what he sees others reading. But if there is a choice between good and and questionable periodicals he chooses those publications that do most to awaken a sense of honor, fair play and a desire for right living.

If, then, there is so little difficulty in placing the best reading matter in the hands of the pupils and so establishing that necessary contact with life, should we not do all in our power to further it? In the Stuyvesant High School a few years ago investigations were made to see what kind of periodicals the pupils were reading, and then the school authorities endeavored to supply a better grade of publications than most of them had been reading. The investigation gave the following results:



Out of 698 boys examined it was found that 332 were reading daily papers that most people call highly sensational; 136 others were reading a paper that makes much of the merely sensational, and the remainder were reading papers of the better type. In telling of the experiment, Mr. Law says:

" Soon after the trial census had been taken a periodical of the highest character was introduced in a classroom of about thirty boys. The objective illustration had its effect. The idealism of the adolescent at once recognized the good. Students in other classes demanded the periodicals in increasing numbers until at last over seven hundred copies of weekly publications of the highest character were purchased by the students voluntarily and almost wholly aside from classroom work. "

All teaching of English literature must concern the attitude toward life. The view one takes of amusements, the things one is interested in, one's attitude toward the world about us---all these come up daily and are molded by what we hear and read. In this country where so many of the pupils in our public schools are of foreign parentage it is essential that our ideals be brought home to the pupils by connecting his life with the life of the world.

Few children, and those of foreign parentage in particular, can be appealed to thru the classics. They are not



ready for them. They think and speak in terms they never see in the books they are required to read in the classroom. If we are to hold their attention and make English instruction count for anything we must find some other textbook.

It is, therefore, only natural that we should turn to the popular literature of the day---newspapers and magazines. It has always been the popular and forceful author and speaker who has changed or modified the vocabularies of the nations. The words and phrases of these people are caught up and carried from tongue to tongue until they are accepted and become a part of our language. The English of magazines is modern---it is written and spoken now and here. All other is dead. A person, to be well educated, should know something of the classics but much knowledge should be built upon the knowledge the child already has.

John B. Opdycke of the Julian Richman High School, New York City, says in the "Education" of September 1915:

" His (the student's) proper training in English must follow a course that will make him facile with pen and tongue in the English everywhere about him, in which he has constant environmental grounding. "

The young reader likes directness and clearness and simplicity. He can depend upon finding this "trinity of understandability" in the newspaper and magazine. He knows, moreover, that he can find almost infinite variety of content in these vehicles of current English. He is not sure of much but fighting



in Scott, of much but adventure in Stevenson, and, while he dearly loves both, he does not care to be surfeited. Besides he finds both of these and more in the current literature on the library table. He prefers his adventures in homeopathic doses. He does not want his fights to last for ten weeks and to be lived through with forty others, day by day. This class of forty, of which he is a member, could read many different newspapers and magazines, or many different books, for that matter, and the pupils could "swap stories" in class. This would be fun. But ten weeks of "Ivanhoe" or "Treasure Island" at a stretch is too much especially with the forty others. We kill their love for good books by wading through them as we do.

Magazines and newspapers are always interesting; books rarely are. Magazines are varied in content, clear in form and simple in presentation. and, what is more important, are seen by youngsters to be far more commonly in the hands of their elders than are books. Imitation is the biggest factor in the education of the child and when he sees his parents interested in magazines, he wants to read the same things.

Two of the commonest arguments against the use of magazines and newspapers in the schools are that they contain so much "twaddle"; and that newspaper and magazine english is slipshod and uncouth. In this connection it is well to remember that the work of most of our great writers of fiction appeared



serially in standard publications before it appeared in book form. Even now the reprints of some of the classics in serial form in our daily newspapers are of great educational value. Not only children, but grown people, glancing thru the paper see these cuttings and become interested and soon have a desire to read other works by the same author.

As to just what constitutes magazine and newspaper English in the bad sense, it is very difficult to be certain. Such English, however, is not slipshod; it is unconventional. Many of the old formal grammatic<sup>al</sup> rules for construction are completely overturned--but it is more than likely that Thackeray, Dickens and Scott overturned the grammatical rules of their day. Magazine English is not uncouth; it is very often "breezy". There is really no difference between the English of our best papers and magazines and that of our best essayists and novelists, or of the best writers of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

I think we need not talk about slipshod and uncouth English in the magazines we propose to place in the hands of our pupils when such men and women as the following write for the most popular schoolroom magazines: Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Van Dyke, Jane Addams, Thomas A. Edison, Rear Admirals Fiske and Peary, Ida M. Tarbell. Not only these, but dozens of other men and women prominent in the world of today are writing for magazines. They come from all the walks of life,--statesmen, scientists, men of the army and navy, biographers, social service workers, poets, professors. Is there any danger of our boys



girls losing interest in the finer things with these writers as models?

Some years ago, teachers in various parts of the country became dissatisfied with the kind of work done in the English classes and determined to try to find a way to put some life into their classes. To make grammatical construction more interesting they used examples from the better magazines. Little by little the idea gained a foothold and grew until thousands of boys and girls, all over the country, are using magazines as texts in their high school work.

Just how long magazines have been used systematically as texts is difficult to say, but several colleges and universities, Boston University, Meredith College and Ohio State University, eg., have been using "The Atlantic Monthly" for nine years; Berkely, California High School and Salt Lake City High School have used it for four years. These are only a few schools from a long list who are using this magazine. No doubt others could show as good a record, were it possible to obtain any statistics.

Magazine study is advocated both by history and english teachers. Those who use them for teaching history, civis and political science, know what they are going after; English teachers on the other hand are not so fortunate.

Lucille F. Fargo, Librarian of the North Central High School of Spokane says in this connection:

" They have listened to the disciples of the "practical" and the "up-to-date" until they are filled with an overflowing



enthusiasm to modernize and vitalize literature courses,---but their condition may aptly be characterized by ' I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way '. "

One of the gravest dangers to teachers of English in using a magazine text is that she may wander from her subject. There is so much to be noted, and talked about in studying a magazine that it is just a little difficult sometimes to stick to composition and literary values.

There are any number of suggestions offered for the use of magazines as English texts and there are a number of magazines that have become very popular in the classroom. The best liked, perhaps, are: The Outlook, Review of Reviews, Independent, Literary Digest, New Republic, Current Opinion, The Nation and the Atlantic Monthly. Each of these numbers thousands of pupils and teachers on its subscription lists.

In only a single instance have I found anyone who suggests giving a course in comparative magazine study, using several different magazines. Most teachers prefer to use a single monthly or weekly and base all magazine work on that.

Lucille F. Fargo, Librarian, Librarian of the North Central High School of Spokane gives a plan for comparative magazine study. She says:

" The chief argument for such a course, is, of course, that modern periodicals are the people's literature, and that it is important that high school boys and girls become acquainted with the best that their time has to offer,--not the worst, nor the



merely mediocre.

Magazine literature is uneven, even the best has its ups and downs. There are many problems involved in such a course:-- How many magazines shall be studied and how many issues of any particular magazine? Shall students be required to subscribe for a certain magazine for a certain length of time? Or shall we see that each pupil is furnished with one issue only, that issue to be thoroughly studied and analyzed? Or shall we ask the various members of the class to subscribe for different magazines?

In our own school we are trying out a plan which includes the intensive study of particular magazines and also comparative work requiring careful examinations of about twenty-five of those magazines known to discriminating readers. In general the plan is like this: Twenty-five copies of one issue of, let us say, "Harper's" are bought by the school district and issued to the members of the class just as free textbooks would be distributed. This issue is studied very carefully from cover to cover. Authors of all articles are looked up in the library. The articles themselves are made the basis for oral themes. The teacher points out leading features---editorial comments, stories, criticisms, illustrations. Having thus learned what to look for, the pupils go on to the study of other periodicals, getting their information from whatever source they can---chiefly the school library, which has not only the current issues, but also many back numbers. In the library they have access to multigraphed



copies of circulars and letters from editors and business managers giving interesting facts relating to the magazine's history, aims and contributors. They choose interesting articles on which to report, and hunt up the authors in "Who's who". By means of the "Reader's Guide" they discover articles by the same author and thus arrive at some conclusion as to his field and popularity. They learn which magazines are good for book reviews, which for current events, which for scientific news, which for editorial comment. Altogether they are encouraged to form an estimate of the value to them of the best things available in the magazine world. "

As I have said, most teachers prefer to use a single monthly or weekly as a text-book, and between those preference falls to the side of the weekly. In many cases the regular textbook has been supplanted altogether by magazines though many teachers do not favor the disuse of a regular text. These last are those who hold to the necessity of teaching the classics and so use the magazine only once a week. Those who do most of their teaching with the aid of a magazine find it excellent for all phases of English work---composition, both oral and written; debate, book reviews, the literary study, prose and poetry.

The Review of Reviews, the Outlook, and the Literary Digest print in each issue an outline to be used in class-room work. These are helpful, not only because they can be followed closely, but because they suggest so many ways in which the teacher may use her own ingenuity in making plans for herself.



Thomas L. Doyle of the English Department, Boys' High school, Brooklyn, New York, says of the plan:--

"Naturally the movement has met with opposition. We are told that it is a form of 'soft' pedagogy which encourages the idle--all too common with pupils--that English consists largely of talking and writing aimlessly about something they have read in a superficial way. Instead of learning to think, they accept half-baked opinions blindly; instead of becoming broadminded, they really narrow themselves down to ephemeral questions, to the neglect of the culture inseparably associated with literature."

The solution, as with most school problems, is the teacher. If he creates the right attitude toward the magazine, if he has a definite aim for each lesson; if he correlates literature and rhetoric with the living present; if he works for useful habits; if he keeps in mind the twofold purpose of English---use and culture--then he will make the periodical a socializing force in which English is a participation in life, not merely a preparation.

Many teachers, however, while admitting the theoretical advantages of the magazine, are opposed to it in practice. They object, first of all, to the financial responsibility. This can easily be delegated to reliable students who can conduct the business entirely outside the recitation.

The strongest objection is the lack of time. "With so many things to teach, how can we stop to discuss what the London 'Times' says about the 'Ancona'?" But might you not as well use this material for oral composition (let us say) as "Emerson on Friendship"? One magazine



lesson a week based on a specific lesson-plan will soon answer this objection better than reasons of reasoning. Therein lies the crux of the matter: the proof of the periodical is in the teaching.

P. A. Jones, Principal of the High School, Sharon, Pennsylvania, said in an address before the English Council meeting of the State Teachers' Association at Clarksburg, West Virginia:

" It is difficult to interest many pupils in the study of their mother tongue. They have fallen into the use of the slang of the street and the colloquialisms of their friends or members of the home. They cannot see the need of refined English. Here is a good place to show, by the use of a well-ordered and dignified magazine, that the eminent men and women of the world aim to use the best English. Point out the accuracy in their choice of words, the careful paragraphing and the clear, forceful sentences. Pick out some of the articles and shows how the very principles given in the rhetoric are applied. This will often give the boy a greater respect for his English work. He will understand that the work he is doing is useful, - it has a place in life.

The old method was to give assignments from the great storehouse of English---the classics. The pupil regards this as too remote and not applicable to the present. He thinks of their authors as dead. The new method is to make assignments



from the classics, but it is more. The classic furnishes the text, the magazine furnishes the live specimen for identification, dissection, and mounting in the mind and experience of the pupil. "

In this same connection, Frederick Hawk Law says:

" In the whole course of study the periodical may be used to awaken appreciation of the written word; to give a background of comparison and contrast to the work presented in the text book, whether in Literature, Rhetoric or Grammar; to develop correct speech habits thru familiarity with the present day writing; to develop the ability to write thru awakening the desire to imitate what has been written concisely and to the point on subjects of real, present and vital interest; to awaken the power of giving helpful and synthetic criticism thru calm and unprejudiced consideration of matters of worldwide importance; to give a fund of general information of all sorts from which the pupil may draw illustrations for all manner of work in English; and lastly, and by no means least, to awaken in the students the belief that English is a living subject, a subject close to everyday life and thought,--a subject that involves the spirit toward life--the attitude one is to take as a citizen of a great republic."

Of the use of magazines in composition--Weldon F. Myers, Professor of English, Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina, says:--



" The current magazine, especially the weekly magazine, has played havoc with our old notions of teaching English recitation. No higher testimony could be given to the clear practical sense, the brilliant intellectual play, and the rich moral and social vitality of the best contemporary journalism. Nothing gives more wonderful and inspiring to the members of the College Press Association than to know the story of how college men and women have gone out into the world and created a living literature which, in turn, has reacted upon the schools and colleges, revitalizing and rejuvenating thousands of feeble, inert and homesick classes.

There are scores of ways in which English teachers have adopted the current magazine. In some classes every pupil subscribes for a weekly magazine, such as the Literary Digest. The teacher may assign topics for oral report in class. In this way the student has been led to do something which was never heard of before, that is, take pleasure in standing before his fellow students and telling a story, or describing an object, or discussing a question. Sometimes the recitation is turned into a debate on some appointed topic of the day, on which each pupil has carefully read. "

In teaching the different kinds of paragraphs, one teacher has found it helpful to have the pupils cut out paragraphs from magazines and paste them, as illustrations, opposite the definitions of the various kinds of paragraphs in their notebooks. They may further add to the interest of their notebooks by the following suggestions from Thomas L. Doyle:--



" The pupils may be led to imitate - in an original way - interviews, editorials, public letters, diplomatic correspondence, stories, essays, letters (from the ads) resolutions, and even poetic forms in envelopes. Both teachers and pupils may preserve these as might be imagined; but the important point here is the concrete study of diction-, sentence-, and paragraph structure, beauty, and other stylistic matters, as well as the added appreciation of literature, classic and modern. "

J. Madison Gathany, A. M., History Department, Hope Street High School, Providence, Rhode Island, says in an article in the Outlook, for August 29th, 1914:--

" Our boys and girls have not kept up with the growth of our vocabulary. As a result, they are out of touch with current thought and expression. Each junior and senior pursuing a course of English or American History is required to take home with him every Friday night a copy of the Outlook, which is his only textbook in history for Monday's work. One of the things each pupil is asked to do is to make out in a notebook a list of the words and expressions he does not understand how to explain or use accurately. "

This improvement in vocabularies could be carried on profitably in English, as well as in history classes.



In oral composition there are many ways of varying the work to make it interesting. This work is usually more successful if the teacher can make the pupils forget her. Let them talk to their classmates and let the class criticise the various recitations. This keeps everyone alert and eager and the boys and girls soon learn to express themselves clearly and fluently in good English. Many teachers have turned the period of oral composition over to the class entirely and have been very successful. Many teachers have found that the use of a weekly periodical has changed a dull, uninterested and uninteresting class into a bright, wideawake, eager one.

I am going to give just one example of one teacher's success with a weekly periodical. It is Alice E. Wyman of the English Department, Technical High School, Fall River, Massachusetts, who tells the following story:--

" ' It is too bad you have to begin with such poor material. That is the worst class in school. I don't believe there ever was a more unresponsive group of boys and girls ' . Thus spoke a member of the faculty one day in the fall soon after I began my work as a teacher in the Fall River Technical High School, and the truth of the remark, together with the realization that I had a problem to solve, came home to me more and more forcefully every day. I believe I confessed to my friend that I had never known such an indifferent, stupid class in all my teaching. They wouldn't talk, they couldn't write, they wouldn't work, - they didn't care. "



Miss Wyman at last determined to try a "live text-book" and suggested a plan in class one day. For two weeks she kept adding to her suggestions and at the end of that time suggested that they buy the Literary Digest. The class agreed and the Digest was ordered. Miss Wyman had her doubts about the success of her plan, but they proved to be ill-founded. The class took an active interest in the work. She describes a class thus:--

" I enter the room, assign Monday's lesson,---nod to Mr. Coffee, the previously appointed chairman and find a chair in the rear of the room. Mr. Coffee nods to the secretary for the day, and both take their places in the front of the room. The boy over in the corner who always whispers is all attention. The chairman speaks. I scarcely believe my ears, as this lad, who was so careless, noisy and indifferent to his English work but a few weeks before, talks to the class of the importance of the period, and introduces the first speaker of the day and the subject he has chosen. Mr. Van, an athletic member, steps to the front of the room, and talks freely and forcefully on 'Our Unpreparedness'. There is applause when he finishes, but only for a few seconds, as the chairman rises to introduce the second speaker, Mr. Devie. Never before has he talked for eight minutes, even with the help of questions. He is interested now and has forgotten himself.

The chairman calls on Mr. Ellsworth. There is another troublermaker. ' He will fail', thought I, but no! He talks very plainly why a government armor-plant would be advisable and what objections are urged."



And so thru out the period, and when the bell rings the pupils all exclaim in protest and Miss Wyman closes: " The members are eager to talk because they have interesting subject matter; they can write better because they see more clearly the value of simple and forceful expression; they are willing to work because they are interested; they care because they feel, unconsciously, perhaps, that they are successful. "

The unbiased discussion of present day questions in these periodicals furnish excellent material for debate. There is always some new question or problem so that the same one need not be used until everyone in the class is bored to death with the subject. The subjects are living vital questions in the life of the nation. The material is not difficult to obtain, and there is more interest and enthusiasm shown in debates based on material found in the magazines than one usually finds in this phase of English work.

Magazines can be used not only in the study of composition and debate, but also in the study of literature, as literature. In all magazines used in schools we find some of the best poems of present day writers as well as from those of the nineteenth century.

Of the study of poetry, Frederick Hawk Law says:



" Our boys have found ' The Independent ' a pathway to the enjoyment of poetry. For some reason, students approach the poetry of The Independent with less suspicion than that in the textbooks. "

This is not only true of the Independent, but of other magazines as well. The Literary Digest, The Outlook, Review of Reviews, Atlantic Monthly, and others, have sections devoted to Poetry. Some of these poems written by present day authors have a very definite relation, either in subject or treatment, to older writers. Such a comparison may be made between Wilfrid Wilson Gibson's " The Message", appearing in the Independent for October 26th, 1917, and Browning's "Incident of the French Camp", and Wordsworth's "The Daffodils" and John Cowper Powy's "Daffodils" in the May 20th, 1917 Literary Digest. Among the betterknown of these writers, whose verses appear in the magazines are Rudyard Kipling, Henry Van Dyke, Mary Shipman Andrews, Rupert Brooke, Service and Thomas Hardy.

George Starr Lasher, Instructor in English, Normal Training High School, Kansas State Normal School, Emporia, Kansas, tells this experience in high school English:--

" But the greatest surprise of all to me was when Frederick Walker, who is as awkward as can be, except in a football



game, confessed that while he could not fully understand Robert Frost's "The Hill Wife", he felt that the loneliness of the New England hills might be something like that of the western prairies of Kansas. His choice of the other poems in the Digest was Catherine Tynan's "To the Others". It is a stirring war song, and the feeling that crept into his voice as he overcame his self consciousness in reading it aloud, made me realize that boys did like poetry even if they are usually ashamed of it. "

Does this not more than answer the question, "Do the pupils lose their love of literature", when they read these poems so eagerly?

There are many excellent short story writers contributing to these magazines besides essayists and statesmen whose articles make excellent examples for school boys and girls to follow.

The Outlook, Literary Digest, Review of Reviews, Atlantic Monthly, Independent, and others, conduct excellent book review departments. Here the latest books are reviewed as well as some of the classics. Among the books reviewed by these magazines are books on science, the war, economics, social problems, fiction. Using these book reviews as models, the pupil can make reviews of books he reads outside of class and so come in contact with those classics so dear to the heart of the pedagogue.



He can give the review in class and so each one may become acquainted with several books without poring over them in the classroom for ten or twelve weeks at a stretch.

There are few children who have a natural love for English as it is usually taught, and they must have something, as has been said before, to show them that English is a vital, living thing that comes in contact with their lives every day, and is not just a list of rules and definitions.

The rates made by the different magazines are such that even the poorest can afford them. If the child has to furnish his own textbooks, it is just as cheap to subscribe for a magazine as to buy a book. In many cases two can subscribe together, each one paying one-half. Some of the magazines cut their subscription price in half in their educational offer and all make a large reduction.

Formerly boys and girls left high school wondering why they had had to study English. They have looked into Chaucer and are bored; they know only enough about Bacon and Carlyle to dislike both thoroughly; Browning is absolutely beyond understanding; the rhetoric is a compilation of rules and definitions without any connection with anything else in the world;--what have they gained? Their vocabularies are poor and their grammar bad because they have had nothing of present day interest to talk about. All their



work has been with words and phraseology of another period.

Under the new method an interest has been aroused in present day questions. The pupils are alert, wide awake. They have formed habits of keeping up on topics of interest and can talk intelligently on them. They have, either consciously or unconsciously, improved their vocabularies so that they will be able to say what they want to say. Their grammar is good because they have had live, interesting models to follow. And the cultural side of their lives has not been neglected, for they have learned to know good literature when they see it, and to understand and appreciate the finer qualities of poetry. They are ready to take their places in the world as reasoning individuals because they have learned to understand and discuss the questions of the day; are not poor book-crammed creatures without an interest in things going on about them.

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